

D R A F T

Letter to the Editor
THE NEW YORK TIMES

In your November 21st edition, Tom Wicker, under the title, "The CIA Security Blanket," writes from the assumption that the only reason the CIA would want to review a book to be published by a former employee is to ^censor revelations of its own shortcomings. What evidence Mr. Wicker has behind his bald assumption, it certainly does not lie in the recent example of the CIA's voluntarily offering to the Congress incriminating documents which it found with respect to the MKULTRA drug testing program.

Much more is at stake, however, in the thrust behind this Wicker piece than the motives of those of us in the CIA. There is a much larger issue of whether the American public should work from the presumption that its public servants all place covering up possible criticism above the responsibilities of their positions and above the law of the land. If such is to be the generally accepted presumption, from it follows the logical conclusion that all 210 million Americans should be entitled to release to the public any information upon which they stumble regardless of whether it happens to be classified by duly constituted authority. Such clearly is Mr. Wicker's thesis; I would suggest it could well result in chaos for our country and our Government.

Secrecy is indeed a dangerous thing, but at the same time a necessary one. Because it has in the past been abused to cover up misdeeds does not mean that we must forever discard the principle of secrecy. In fact, since Watergate there have been established new checks and balances and a new set of government officials. If public trust is ever to be restored in the governmental process, these officials and these processes must be given some opportunity to prove themselves. Throwing the baby out with the bath water is hardly a satisfactory process.

We might even make it an accepted premise that an appointed official such as myself would conform with law -- such as that which specifically requires the Director of Central Intelligence to protect the unauthorized release of information on how we obtain our intelligence. The man who Mr. Wicker extols in his article has egregiously revealed such information, possibly at the expense of a life of individuals who trusted and worked for the United States in Vietnam because they believed in our standards and our purposes. In short, as the Director of Central Intelligence, I am today not taking recourse to the law with respect to Mr. Frank Snepp in either retribution or an effort to cover up but rather as a matter of duty under the law and as a matter of my sense of the long-term welfare of our country.

In my view, "Sixty Minutes," Random House, and Wicker have all fallen prey to nothing more than a sophistic argument as to why Mr. Snepp felt authorized to release his book without prior check by the CIA on whether its contents included classified material. That sophistry was simply that the CIA had once released some information in an unauthorized

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manner (to the best of my knowledge untrue) and that therefore he, Snepp, was now free to release not only that same information (which I willingly provided to him myself on an unclassified basis) but a wealth of other unrelated data. If our country does not reject this type of shallow reasoning and reject the Wicker thesis that 210 million Americans can determine what properly should remain secret, our future indeed is to be handicapped unnecessarily and extensively.

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In your November 21st edition, Tom Wicker, under the title, "The CIA Security Blanket," writes from the assumption that the only reason the CIA would want to review a book to be published by a former employee is to ^e sensor revelations of its ~~own~~ ^{PAST} shortcomings. What evidence Mr. Wicker has behind his bald assumption, it certainly does not lie in the recent example of the CIA's voluntarily offering to the Congress incriminating documents which it found with respect to the MKULTRA drug testing program, and willingness to provide them to the public under the Freedom of Information Act).

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Secrecy is indeed a dangerous thing, but at the same time a necessary one. Because it has in the past been abused to cover up misdeeds does not mean that we must forever discard the principle of secrecy. In fact, since Watergate there have been established new checks and balances and a new set of government officials. If public trust is ever to be restored in the governmental process, these officials and these processes must be given some opportunity to prove themselves. Unless they are we face a situation where any disclosure of classified material, regardless of sensitivity and potential damage to the United States, is justified if packaged as an "expose."

For those who are neither charged by law with protecting national secrets nor have responsibility for the consequences of disclosure and completely lack the depth of knowledge to appreciate the damage of publication to take it upon themselves to make the only judgment of what should be protected and what should not is the height of intellectual arrogance and civic irresponsibility. But then I suppose it does sell books.

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I am disappointed that Mr. Wicker and Random House could fall prey to Mr. Snepp's other poorly reasoned justification for non-clearance. It is simple sophistry to argue that since the CIA had once released some information in an unauthorized manner (to the best of my knowledge untrue) therefore he, Snepp, was now free to release not only that same information (which I willingly provided to him myself on an unclassified basis) but a wealth of other unrelated data. I'm afraid the whole thesis is so transparently self-serving as to cast in doubt the entire intellectual basis of whatever case Mr. Snepp develops in his book. Perhaps I can forgive Mr. Snepp for a youthful over-exuberance which clouded his sense of integrity. But ~~for~~^{can} a sophisticated editorial writer and book publisher ~~to~~ be similarly taken in I am surprised.